



APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO RIO DE JANEIRO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE XXVIII WORLD YOUTH DAY

MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Archbishop's House, Rio de Janeiro
Saturday, 28 July 2013

Dear Brothers,

How good it is to be here with you, the Bishops of Brazil!

Thank you for coming, and please allow me to speak with you as one among friends. That's why I prefer to speak to you in Spanish, so as to express better what I carry in my heart. I ask you to forgive me.

We are meeting somewhat apart, in this place prepared by our brother, Archbishop Orani Tempesta, so that we can be alone and speak to one another from the heart, as pastors to whom God has entrusted his flock. On the streets of Rio, young people from all over the world and countless others await us, needing to be reached by the merciful gaze of Christ the Good Shepherd, whom we are called to make present. So let us enjoy this moment of repose, exchange of ideas and authentic fraternity.

Beginning with the President of the Episcopal Conference and the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, I want to embrace each and every one of you, and in a particular way the Emeritus Bishops.

More than a formal address, I would like to share some reflections with you.

The first came to mind again when I visited the shrine of Aparecida. There, at the foot of the statue of the Immaculate Conception, I prayed for you, your Churches, your priests, men and women religious, seminarians, laity and their families and, in a particular way, the young people and the elderly: these last are the hope of a nation; the young, because they bring strength, idealism and hope for the future; the elderly because they represent the memory, the wisdom of the people.[\[1\]](#)

1. Aparecida: a key for interpreting the Church's mission

In Aparecida God gave Brazil his own Mother. But in Aparecida God also offered a lesson about himself, about his way of being and acting. A lesson about the humility which is one of God's essential features, and which is part of God's DNA. Aparecida offers us a perennial teaching about

God and about the Church; a teaching which neither the Church in Brazil nor the nation itself must forget.

At the beginning of the Aparecida event, there were poor fishermen looking for food. So much hunger and so few resources. People always need bread. People always start with their needs, even today.

They have a dilapidated, ill-fitted boat; their nets are old and perhaps torn, insufficient.

First comes the effort, perhaps the weariness, of the catch, yet the results are negligible: a failure, time wasted. For all their work, the nets are empty.

Then, when God wills it, he mysteriously enters the scene. The waters are deep and yet they always conceal the possibility of a revelation of God. He appeared out of the blue, who knows for how long, when he was no longer expected. The patience of those who await him is always tested. And God arrived in a novel fashion, since God is wonder: as a fragile clay statue, darkened by the waters of the river and aged by the passage of time. God always enters clothed in poverty, littleness.

Then there is the statue itself of the Immaculate Conception. First, the body appeared, then the head, then the head was joined to the body: unity. What had been broken is restored and becomes one. Colonial Brazil had been divided by the shameful wall of slavery. Our Lady of Aparecida appears with a black face, first separated, and then united in the hands of the fishermen.

Here there is a message which God wants to teach us. His own beauty, reflected in his Mother conceived without original sin, emerges from the darkness of the river. In Aparecida, from the beginning, God's message was one of restoring what was broken, reuniting what had been divided. Walls, chasms, differences which still exist today are destined to disappear. The Church cannot neglect this lesson: she is called to be a means of reconciliation.

The fishermen do not dismiss the mystery encountered in the river, even if it is a mystery which seems incomplete. They do not throw away the pieces of the mystery. They await its completion. And this does not take long to come. There is a wisdom here that we need to learn. There are pieces of the mystery, like the stones of a mosaic, which we encounter. We are impatient, anxious to see the whole picture, but God lets us see things slowly, quietly. The Church also has to learn how to wait.

Then the fishermen bring the mystery home. Ordinary people always have room to take in the mystery. Perhaps we have reduced our way of speaking about mystery to rational explanations; but for ordinary people the mystery enters through the heart. In the homes of the poor, God always finds a place.

The fishermen "bundle up" the mystery, they clothe the Virgin drawn from the waters as if she were cold and needed to be warmed. God asks for shelter in the warmest part of ourselves: our heart. God himself releases the heat we need, but first he enters like a shrewd beggar. The fishermen wrap the mystery of the Virgin with the lowly mantle of their faith. They call their neighbours to see its rediscovered beauty; they all gather around and relate their troubles in its presence and they entrust their causes to it. In this way they enable God's plan to be accomplished: first comes one grace, then another; one grace leads to another; one grace prepares for another. God gradually unfolds the mysterious humility of his power.

There is much we can learn from the approach of the fishermen. About a Church which makes room for God's mystery; a Church which harbours that mystery in such a way that it can entice people, attract them. Only the beauty of God can attract. God's way is through enticement which attracts us. God lets himself be brought home. He awakens in us a desire to keep him and his life in our homes, in our hearts. He reawakens in us a desire to call our neighbours in order to make known his beauty. Mission is born precisely from this divine allure, by this amazement born of encounter. We speak about mission, about a missionary Church. I think of those fishermen calling their neighbours to see the mystery of the Virgin. Without the simplicity of their approach, our mission is doomed to failure.

The Church needs constantly to relearn the lesson of Aparecida; she must not lose sight of it. The Church's nets are weak, perhaps patched; the Church's barque is not as powerful as the great transatlantic liners which cross the ocean. And yet God wants to be seen precisely through our resources, scanty resources, because he is always the one who acts.

Dear brothers, the results of our pastoral work do not depend on a wealth of resources, but on the creativity of love. To be sure, perseverance, effort, hard work, planning and organization all have their place, but first and foremost we need to realize that the Church's power does not reside in herself; it is hidden in the deep waters of God, into which she is called to cast her nets.

Another lesson which the Church must constantly recall is that she cannot leave simplicity behind; otherwise she forgets how to speak the language of Mystery, and she herself remains outside the door of the mystery, and obviously, she proves incapable of approaching those who look to the Church for something which they themselves cannot provide, namely, God himself. At times we lose people because they don't understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and import an intellectualism foreign to our people. Without the grammar of simplicity, the Church loses the very conditions which make it possible "to fish" for God in the deep waters of his Mystery.

A final thought: Aparecida took place at a crossroads. The road which linked Rio, the capital, with São Paulo, the resourceful province then being born, and Minas Gerais, the mines coveted by the courts of Europe, was a major intersection in colonial Brazil. God appears at the crossroads. The Church in Brazil cannot forget this calling which was present from the moment of her birth: to be a beating heart, to gather and to spread.

2. Appreciation for the path taken by the Church in Brazil

The Bishops of Rome have always had a special place in their heart for Brazil and its Church. A marvellous journey has been accomplished. From twelve dioceses during the First Vatican Council, it now numbers 275 circumscriptions. This was not the expansion of an organization or a business enterprise, but rather the dynamism of the Gospel story of the "five loaves and two fish" which, through the bounty of the Father and through tireless labour, bore abundant fruit.

Today I would like to acknowledge your unsparing work as pastors in your local Churches. I think of Bishops in the forests, travelling up and down rivers, in semiarid places, in the Pantanal, in the pampas, in the urban jungles of your sprawling cities. Always love your flock with complete devotion! I also think of all those names and faces which have indelibly marked the journey of the Church in Brazil, making palpable the Lord's immense bounty towards this Church. [\[2\]](#)

The Bishops of Rome were never distant; they followed, encouraged and supported this journey. In recent decades, [Blessed John XXIII](#) urged the Brazilian Bishops to draw up their first pastoral plan and, from that beginning a genuine pastoral tradition arose in Brazil, one which prevented the Church from drifting and provided it with a sure compass. The [Servant of God Paul VI](#) encouraged the reception of the [Second Vatican Council](#) not only in fidelity but also in creativity (cf. the CELAM General Assembly in Medellin), and decisively influenced the self-identity of the Church in Brazil through the Synod on evangelization and that basic point of reference which remains relevant is the [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#). [Blessed John Paul II](#) visited Brazil three times, going up and down the country, from north to south, emphasizing the Church's pastoral mission, communion and participation, preparation for the Great Jubilee and the new evangelization. [Benedict XVI](#) chose Aparecida as the site of the Fifth CELAM General Assembly and this left a profound mark on the Church of the whole continent.

The Church in Brazil welcomed and creatively applied the [Second Vatican Council](#), and the course it has taken, though needing to overcome some teething problems, has led to a Church gradually more mature, open, generous and missionary.

Today, times have changed. As the Aparecida document nicely put it: ours is not an age of change, but a change of age. So today we urgently need to keep putting the question: what is it that God is asking of us? I would now like to sketch a few ideas by way of a response.

3. The icon of Emmaus as a key for interpreting the present and the future

Before all else, we must not yield to the fear once expressed by Blessed John Henry Newman: "... the Christian world is gradually becoming barren and effete, as land which has been worked out and is become sand".^[3] We must not yield to disillusionment, discouragement and complaint. We have laboured greatly and, at times, we see what appear to be failures. We feel like those who must tally up a losing season as we consider those who have left us or no longer consider us credible or relevant.

Let us read once again, in this light, the story of Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24:13-15). The two disciples have left Jerusalem. They are leaving behind the "nakedness" of God. They are scandalized by the failure of the Messiah in whom they had hoped and who now appeared utterly vanquished, humiliated, even after the third day (vv. 17-21). Here we have to face the difficult mystery of those people who leave the Church, who, under the illusion of alternative ideas, now think that the Church – their Jerusalem – can no longer offer them anything meaningful and important. So they set off on the road alone, with their disappointment. Perhaps the Church appeared too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas, perhaps the world seems to have made the Church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions; perhaps the Church could speak to people in their infancy but not to those come of age.^[4] It is a fact that nowadays there are many people like the two disciples of Emmaus; not only those looking for answers in the new religious groups that are sprouting up, but also those who already seem godless, both in theory and in practice.

Faced with this situation, what are we to do?

We need a Church unafraid of going forth into their night. We need a Church capable of meeting them on their way. We need a Church capable of entering into their conversation. We need a Church able to dialogue with those disciples who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering

aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil, incapable of generating meaning.

A relentless process of globalization, an often uncontrolled process of intense urbanization, has promised great things. Many people have been captivated by their potential, which of course contains positive elements as, for example, the shortening of distance, the drawing closer of peoples and cultures, the diffusion of information and of services. On the other hand, however, many are living the negative effects of these realities without realizing how they affect a proper vision of man and of the world. This generates enormous confusion and an emptiness which people are unable to explain, regarding the purpose of life, personal disintegration, the loss of the experience of belonging to a “home” and the absence of personal space and strong personal ties.

And since there is no one to accompany them or to show them with his or her own life the true way, many have sought shortcuts, because the standards set by Mother Church seem to be asking too much. There are also those who recognize the ideal of man and of life as proposed by the Church, but they do not have the audacity to embrace it. They think that this ideal is too lofty for them, that it is beyond their abilities, and that the goal the Church sets is unattainable. Nonetheless they cannot live without having at least something, even a poor imitation of what seems too grand and distant. With disappointed hearts, they then go off in search of something which will lead them even further astray, or which brings them to a partial belonging that, ultimately, does not fulfill their lives.

The great sense of abandonment and solitude, of not even belonging to oneself, which often results from this situation, is too painful to hide. Some kind of release is necessary. There is always the option of complaining. But even complaint acts like a boomerang; it comes back and ends up increasing one’s unhappiness. Few people are still capable of hearing the voice of pain; the best we can do is to anaesthetize it.

From this point of view, we need a Church capable of walking at people’s side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the “night” contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a Church which realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture. Jesus warmed the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus.

I would like all of us to ask ourselves today: are we still a Church capable of warming hearts? A Church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home? Jerusalem is where our roots are: Scripture, catechesis, sacraments, community, friendship with the Lord, Mary and the apostles... Are we still able to speak of these roots in a way that will revive a sense of wonder at their beauty?

Many people have left because they were promised something more *lofty*, more *powerful*, and *faster*.

But what is *more lofty* than the love revealed in Jerusalem? Nothing is more lofty than the abasement of the Cross, since there we truly approach the height of love! Are we still capable of demonstrating this truth to those who think that the apex of life is to be found elsewhere?

Do we know anything *more powerful* than the strength hidden within the weakness of love, goodness, truth and beauty?

People today are attracted by things that are *faster and faster*: rapid Internet connections, speedy cars and planes, instant relationships. But at the same time we see a desperate need for calmness, I would even say slowness. Is the Church still able to move slowly: to take the time to listen, to have the patience to mend and reassemble? Or is the Church herself caught up in the frantic pursuit of efficiency? Dear brothers, let us recover the calm to be able to walk at the same pace as our pilgrims, keeping alongside them, remaining close to them, enabling them to speak of the disappointments present in their hearts and to let us address them. They want to forget Jerusalem, where they have their sources, but eventually they will experience thirst. We need a Church capable of accompanying them on the road back to Jerusalem! A Church capable of helping them to rediscover the glorious and joyful things that are spoken of Jerusalem, and to understand that she is my Mother, our Mother, and that we are not orphans! We were born in her. Where is our Jerusalem, where were we born? In Baptism, in the first encounter of love, in our calling, in vocation.^[5] We need a Church that kindles hearts and warms them.

We need a Church capable of restoring citizenship to her many children who are journeying, as it were, in an exodus.

4. Challenges facing the Church in Brazil

In the light of what I have said above, I would like to emphasize several challenges facing the beloved Church in Brazil.

Formation as a priority: Bishops, priests, religious, laity

Dear brothers, unless we train ministers capable of warming people's hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey? It isn't true that God's presence has been dimmed in them. Let us learn to look at things more deeply. What is missing is someone to warm their heart, as was the case with the disciples of Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24:32).

That is why it is important to devise and ensure a suitable formation, one which will provide persons able to step into the night without being overcome by the darkness and losing their bearings; able to listen to people's dreams without being seduced and to share their disappointments without losing hope and becoming bitter; able to sympathize with the brokenness of others without losing their own strength and identity.

What is needed is a solid human, cultural, effective, spiritual and doctrinal formation.^[6] Dear brother Bishops, courage is needed to undertake a thorough review of the structures in place for the formation and preparation of the clergy and the laity of the Church in Brazil. It is not enough that formation be considered a vague priority, either in documents or at meetings. What is needed is the practical wisdom to set up lasting educational structures on the local, regional and national levels and to take them to heart as Bishops, without sparing energy, concern and personal interest. The present situation calls for quality formation at every level. Bishops may not delegate this task. You cannot delegate this task, but must embrace it as something fundamental for the journey of your Churches.

Collegiality and solidarity in the Episcopal Conference

The Church in Brazil needs more than a national leader; it needs a network of regional “testimonies” which speak the same language and in every place ensure not unanimity, but true unity in the richness of diversity.

Communion is a fabric to be woven with patience and perseverance, one which gradually “draws together the stitches” to make a more extensive and thick cover. A threadbare cover will not provide warmth.

It is important to remember Aparecida, the method of gathering diversity together. Not so much a diversity of ideas in order to produce a document, but a variety of experiences of God, in order to set a vital process in motion.

The disciples of Emmaus returned to Jerusalem, recounting their experience of meeting the risen Christ. There they came to know other manifestations of the Lord and the experiences of their brothers and sisters. The Episcopal Conference is precisely a vital space for enabling such an exchange of testimonies about encounters with the Risen One, in the north, in the south, in the west... There is need, then, for a greater appreciation of local and regional elements. Central bureaucracy is not sufficient; there is also a need for increased collegiality and solidarity. This will be a source of true enrichment for all.^[7]

Permanent state of mission and pastoral conversion

Aparecida spoke about a permanent state of mission^[8] and of the need for pastoral conversion.^[9] These are two important results of that Assembly for the entire Church in the area, and the progress made in Brazil on these two points has been significant.

Concerning mission, we need to remember that its urgency derives from its inner motivation; in other words, it is about handing on a legacy. As for method, it is essential to realize that a legacy is about witness, it is like the baton in a relay race: you don't throw it up in the air for whoever is able to catch it, so that anyone who doesn't catch it has to manage without. In order to transmit a legacy, one needs to hand it over personally, to touch the one to whom one wants to give, to relay, this inheritance.

Concerning pastoral conversion, I would like to recall that “pastoral care” is nothing other than the exercise of the Church's motherhood. She gives birth, suckles, gives growth, corrects, nourishes and leads by the hand ... So we need a Church capable of rediscovering the maternal womb of mercy. Without mercy we have little chance nowadays of becoming part of a world of “wounded” persons in need of understanding, forgiveness, love.

In mission, also on a continental level,^[10] it is very important to reaffirm the family, which remains the essential cell of society and the Church; young people, who are the face of the Church's future; women, who play a fundamental role in passing on the faith and who are a daily source of strength in a society that carries this faith forward and renews it. Let us not reduce the involvement of women in the Church, but instead promote their active role in the ecclesial community. If the Church, in her complete and real dimension, loses women, she risks becoming sterile. Aparecida also highlights the vocation and mission of the man in the family, in the Church and in society, as fathers, workers and citizens. Let us take this seriously!

The task of the Church in society

In the context of society, there is only one thing which the Church quite clearly demands: the freedom to proclaim the Gospel in its entirety, even when it runs counter to the world, even when it goes against the tide. In so doing, she defends treasures of which she is merely the custodian, and values which she does not create but rather receives, to which she must remain faithful.

The Church affirms the right to serve man in his wholeness, and to speak of what God has revealed about human beings and their fulfilment. The Church wants to make present that spiritual patrimony without which society falls apart and cities are overwhelmed by their own walls, pits and barriers. The Church has the right and the duty to keep alive the flame of human freedom and unity.

Education, health, social harmony are pressing concerns in Brazil. The Church has a word to say on these issues, because any adequate response to these challenges calls for more than merely technical solutions; there has to be an underlying view of man, his freedom, his value, his openness to the transcendent. Dear brother Bishops, do not be afraid to offer this contribution of the Church, which benefits society as a whole and to offer this word “incarnate” also through witness.

The Amazon Basin as a litmus test for Church and society in Brazil

There is one final point on which I would like to dwell, which I consider relevant for the present and future journey not only of the Brazilian Church but of the whole society, namely, the Amazon Basin. The Church’s presence in the Amazon Basin is not that of someone with bags packed and ready to leave after having exploited everything possible. The Church has been present in the Amazon Basin from the beginning, in her missionaries, religious congregations, priests, laity and Bishops and she is still present and critical to the area’s future. I think of the welcome which the Church in the Amazon Basin is offering today to Haitian immigrants following the terrible earthquake which shook their country.

I would like to invite everyone to reflect on what Aparecida said about the Amazon Basin,^[11] its forceful appeal for respect and protection of the entire creation which God has entrusted to man, not so that it be indiscriminately exploited, but rather made into a garden. In considering the pastoral challenge represented by the Amazon Basin, I have to express my thanks for all that the Church in Brazil is doing: the Episcopal Commission for the Amazon Basin established in 1997 has already proved its effectiveness and many dioceses have responded readily and generously to the appeal for solidarity by sending lay and priestly missionaries. I think Archbishop Jaime Chemelo, a pioneer in this effort, and Cardinal Hummes, the current President of the Commission. But I would add that the Church’s work needs to be further encouraged and launched afresh. There is a need for quality formators, especially formators and professors of theology, for consolidating the results achieved in the area of training a native clergy and providing priests suited to local conditions and committed to consolidating, as it were, the Church’s “Amazonian face”. In this, please, I ask you, be courageous, and have parrhesia! In the “porteño” language [of Buenos Aires], be fearless.

Dear brother Bishops, I have attempted to offer you in a fraternal spirit some reflections and approaches for a Church like that of Brazil, which is a great mosaic made up of small stones, images, forms, problems and challenges, but which for this very reason is an enormous treasure. The Church is never uniformity, but diversities harmonized in unity, and this is true for every ecclesial reality.

May the Virgin of Aparecida be the star which illumines your task and your journey of bringing Christ, as she did, to all the men and women of your immense country. Just as he did for the two lost and disillusioned disciples of Emmaus, he will warm your hearts and give you new and certain hope.

[1] The Aparecida Document stresses how children, young people and the elderly build the future of peoples (cf. No. 447).

[2] I recall for example, to cite only a few: Lorscheider, Mendes de Almeida, Sales, Vital, Camara, Macedo... as well as the first Bishop in Brazil, Pero Fernandes Sardinha (1551/1556), killed by hostile local tribes.

[3] Letter of 26 January 1833 to his mother, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. III (Oxford, 1979), p. 204.

[4] The Aparecida Document provides a synthetic presentation of the deeper reasons behind this phenomenon (cf. No. 225).

[5] Cf. also the four points mentioned by Aparecida (No. 226).

[6] The Aparecida Document gives great attention to the formation both of the clergy and the laity (cf. Nos. 316-325; 212).

[7] Also for this aspect the Aparecida Document offers important lines of approach (cf. Nos 181-183; 189).

[8] Cf. No. 216.

[9] Cf. Nos. 365-372.

[10] The conclusions of the Aparecida Conference insist on the countenance of a Church which is by her very nature evangelizing, which exists for evangelization, with boldness and freedom, at all levels (cf. Nos. 547-554).

[11] Cf. especially Nos. 83-87 and from the standpoint of a unitary pastoral plan, No. 475.

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